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Who Practices What? A Correlational Study of Personality Type and Teaching Reflection

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Abstract

The debates of Prabhu (1990) and Kumaravadivelu (1994; 2001; 2003; 2006) against the “designer methods” (Nunan, 1989) highlighted the importance of the teacher and what he or she can actually do in the classroom. Therefore, teachers are no longer looked at the only transferors of knowledge but also bringing with themselves teaching initiatives among which is their capability to reflect on their practices in their classes. Drawing on John Dewey’s ideas, Akbari (2007) defined a reflective teacher as the “one who critically examines his/her practices, comes up with some ideas as how to improve his/her performance to enhance students’ learning, and puts those ideas into practice” (p. 194). However, given the fact that all teachers are not of the same personality types, it is hypothesized that teachers with one particular personality type prefer to rely on one element of teaching reflection. This provided enough impetus for us to investigate the relationship between the teachers’ personality types and their teaching reflection elements. To this end, we drew on John and Srivastava’s (1999) the Big Five Inventory Personality Test and Akbari et. al’s (2010) the reflective teaching instrument and asked 200 university professors to fill them out. The results confirmed the hypothesis that each personality type correlated with particular elements of the teaching reflection. Extrovert teachers, for instance, were found to draw on the affective element in their teaching practices. The pedagogical implications of the findings are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Personality types play a significant role in influencing the ways teachers reflect on their teaching styles and strategies. What this means is that the type of teachers' personalities is critical to their teaching reflections and could potentially determine their teaching reflections. Thus, here it is hypothesized that each teacher with a specific personality type prefers particular components of teaching reflections. Pervin and John (2001) define personality as those characteristics of a person that account for consistent patterns of feeling, thinking and behaving. Miller (1991) and Poropat (2009) argue that understanding and identifying the personality types is critical to various academic behaviors. There are a number of studies which have investigated the relationships between personality types and other individual traits. For instance, there is some evidence that personality and motivation are intricately tied with individual differences in learning styles, and Miller (1991) suggested that in order for educators to understand academic behavior they must go beyond the current emphasis on cognition and incorporate these variables into their educational curricula. Verhoeven and Vermeer (2002) found a positive correlation regarding the children's openness to all kinds of communicative competence, suggesting a positive relation between their personality and their motivation. Komaraju, Karau, Schemick, and Advic (2011) found that two of the Big Five traits, conscientiousness and agreeableness, were positively related with all four learning styles (synthesis analysis, methodical study, fact retention, and elaborative processing), whereas neuroticism was negatively related with all four learning styles. In addition, extraversion and openness were positively related with elaborative processing (cf, Furnham, 1992; Geisler-Brenstein, Schmeck, & Hetherington, 1996; Zhang, 2003). There are a number of self-report and language-specific questionnaires to measure personality type (e.g. Ely, 1986) which include such personality traits as risk-taking and tolerance of ambiguity. In the present study, we employed the Big Five Inventory Personality Test developed by John and Srivastava (1999) which is among the most frequently used personality tests. This questionnaire has the following subscales which need elaboration.

- **Conscientiousness** refers to the quality of being disciplined, organized, and achievement-oriented.
- **Neuroticism** is the degree of emotional stability, impulse control, and anxiety.
- **Extraversion** is revealed through a higher degree of sociability, assertiveness, and talkativeness.
- **Openness** is exemplified by a strong intellectual curiosity and a preference for novelty and variety.
- Finally, **agreeableness** shows one's being helpful, cooperative, and sympathetic towards others.

However, with reference to the teacher reflective practices, there is only one questionnaire to capture teaching reflection practices developed by Akbari, Behzadpour and Dadvand (2010). Akbari et. al (2010) have identified six elements for reflective teaching:

Practical element:

Following Farrell (2004), Murphy (2001), Richards and Farrell (2005), and Richards and Lockhart (1994), Akbari et. al (2010) argue that this component includes those items that deal with the tools and the actual practice of reflection. 'Journal writing,' 'lesson reports,' 'surveys and questionnaires,' 'audio and video recordings,' 'observation,' 'action research,' 'teaching portfolios,' 'group discussions,' 'analyzing critical incidents' are some examples.

Cognitive element:

Akbari et.al (2010) argue that according to Farrell (2004) and Richards and Farrell (2005) this element helps teachers develop academic professionalism. Conducting small-scale classroom research projects (action research), attending conferences and workshops related to one's field of study, and reading the professional literature are among the behaviors included in this domain.

Learner element (affective):

Unlike the above-mentioned elements, here the learner is put in the spotlight. Akbari et al (2010) suggest that items directly dealing with a teacher's reflecting on his/her students, how they are learning and how learners respond or behave emotionally in their classes are captured by this element.

Meta-cognitive element:

Unlike the previous, this component deals with teachers and their reflections on their own beliefs and personality, the way they define their practice, their own emotional make up, etc. (Hillier, 2005; Pollard et al., 2006; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Stanley, 1998; Zeichner & Liston, 1996, cited in Akbari, et. al,

2010).

Critical element

Items that refer to the socio-political aspects of pedagogy and reflections upon those comprise this element. They specifically deal with teachers' reflecting on the political significance of their practice and introducing topics related to race, gender and social class, exploring ways for student empowerment.

Moral element

Moral issues and ethical considerations are the main teaching reflective practices. Akbari et. al (2010) advocate three sub-elements for the moral element. The 'deliberative approach' "urges teachers to think critically about their purposes and how to justify them from a moral point of view" (Hansen, 1998, p. 644). The second approach called the 'relational approach' "draws upon moral philosophy and feminist theory which centers the moral life around issues of personal character and how individuals regard and treat other individuals" (p. 645) and finally the third approach called the 'critical approach', which is, according to Hansen (1998), very much similar to critical one discussed above.

2. The current study

Prior research has indicated that personality traits and other individual characteristics are associated with one another in one way or another. However, whether and how the teacher personality traits and their reflection practices are correlated still remains unknown. In the current research, we sought to fill this gap in the literature by directly examining relationships between personality types and the teacher's reflection practice. To this end, 200 teachers including (97 females and 103 males) were asked to fill out the following two questionnaires:

1. The Big Five Inventory Personality Test (John & Srivastava, 1999)
2. Teaching reflection inventory (Akbari, Behzadpour & Dadvand, 2010).

Using the afore-mentioned instruments the present study answers the following research question:
Is there any correlation between teachers' personality types and their teaching reflection elements?

To make sure that all the participants understood the items of the questionnaire, they were translated into Persian. The reliability of the Persian version of the questionnaires was also assessed through a pilot study of the participants who were representative of the actual participants of the current study (Table 1). As it is shown in the table, the reliability indices of the questionnaires were

Table 1
Reliability reports of BFPT and TRC inventories

	Cronbach's Alpha
BFPT	0.79
TRC	0.80

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Correlation analyses

Our analyses revealed a number of significant relationships between personality types and the teachers' reflection elements (Table 2 below).

Table 2: Teacher reflection components

Big five personality traits	Practical	Cognitive	Learner	Metacognitive	Critical	Moral
Extraversion	.01	.12**	.32**	-.04	.01	.05
Agreeableness	.01	.42**	.06	-.17**	.03	.05
Conscientiousness	.03	.06	.04	.06	.02	.32**
Neuroticism	.11**	.12**	.04	-.16**	.04	.03
Openness	.04	.60**	.06	.05	-.01**	.02

To begin with, it was found that there is a positive relationship between extravert teachers and those teachers who have both cognitive and learner reflection components as their teaching reflective practices. One possible explanation is that due to sociability nature (Eysenck & Chan, 1982) of extravert individuals, they are prompted to attending conferences and workshops related to their fields of study and be in constant contact with their learners. Regarding agreeableness, due to the broadly beneficial effects of cooperative attitudes, we found that agreeableness was positively correlated with the cognitive component implying that these personality types are more eager to cooperate with, take part in and discuss issues with their colleagues.

In contrast, this personality type went against the metacognitive component since those teachers with this teaching reflection are obsessed with their own emotional make-up and are not keen to engage themselves in group activities.

Conscientious individuals are likely to be high achievers as they have a strong work ethic and we found that they are correlated with moral elements of teaching reflection since it takes into account the notion of ethics and morality.

Regarding neuroticism, individuals who experience anxiety, self-doubt, and negative emotionality persist when facing difficulties. Thus it seems admissible to expect these people to have rejected strongly metacognitive element of teaching reflection.

Regarding openness, individuals who score high on this trait display a strong intellectual curiosity and are eager to learn. Thus one way to welcome novelty might be attending conferences and workshops related to one's field of study, and reading the professional literature.

4. Pedagogical implications and suggestions further research:

As Miller (1991) and Poropat (2009) argue understanding and identifying the personality types of teachers is critical to their various academic behaviors. Thus, to enhance teachers' academic achievements it is incumbent on language education programmers to give considerable attention to all teacher variables among which are their personality types and their reflective teaching practices.

The present research opened up avenues for further research. First, the relationship between the teacher's personality traits and their reflection components was investigated with some possible correlations. However, whether and how these correlations predict students achievement is still unknown. Research, for instance, has shown that conscientiousness has consistently emerged as a stable predictor of exam performance (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003). Combinations of Big Five traits have also been found to predict various educational outcomes. For example, Paunonen and Ashton (2001) found that conscientiousness and openness predict course performance. Or Farsides and Woodfield (2003) and Poropat, (2009) found that agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness predict overall academic performance.

It is also to be noted that the issue of gender was not investigated. Thus, it warrants a separate study to indicate whether male and female teachers with particular personality types differ in their practices of reflection from those of opposite gender.

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